

STATE HISTORICAL
SOCIETY OF IOWA
IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

The Annals of Iowa

Volume 71 | Number 3 (Summer 2012)

pps. 283-284

Winning the West for Women: The Life of Suffragist Emma Smith DeVoe

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ISSN 0003-4827

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Recommended Citation

Green, Kathleen M. "Winning the West for Women: The Life of Suffragist Emma Smith DeVoe." *The Annals of Iowa* 71 (2012), 283-284.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.1650>

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Winning the West for Women: The Life of Suffragist Emma Smith DeVoe, by Jennifer M. Ross-Nazzal. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011. xv, 256 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$26.95 paper.

Reviewer Kathleen M. Green is professor of history at Morningside College. Her research and writing have focused on woman suffrage and temperance.

Winning the West for Women is the first full-length scholarly study of the life of suffragist Emma Smith DeVoe. Jennifer M. Ross-Nazzal has uncovered the forgotten career of a woman who was "one of the country's most celebrated suffragists of her time" (12). Ross-Nazzal argues convincingly that DeVoe made a vital contribution to the woman suffrage movement on both the state and national levels. While concentrating on DeVoe, this study reaffirms the important role western women played in the suffrage struggle.

Ross-Nazzal has done the hard work of retrieving new primary sources from dozens of research collections and local newspapers scattered all over the country. By carefully analyzing the sources and placing DeVoe's actions and attitudes in a cultural and political context, Ross-Nazzal develops a complex and comprehensible narrative. Throughout the biography, Ross-Nazzal recognizes DeVoe's strengths as an effective campaigner and an adaptable strategist. Readers of the *Annals of Iowa* will find that DeVoe learned her craft in South Dakota and Iowa. During the 1890 South Dakota campaign, Susan B. Anthony worked with DeVoe on her speaking and organizational skills. Ross-Nazzal finds that DeVoe "played a much larger role in shaping the South Dakota campaign than historians and suffragists have given her credit for" (37). In 1892 Carrie Chapman Catt hired DeVoe to work in Iowa. That experience "helped to establish her national reputation as an effective fundraiser" (71). When she "spearheaded the Woman's Day and its activities at the South Dakota state fair held in Aberdeen," DeVoe introduced a model activity to the rural Midwest (71). The Iowa Woman Suffrage Association successfully adapted the tactic of a Woman's Day at the Iowa State Fair.

Ross-Nazzal courageously confronts controversial issues and divisions in the suffrage movement. She uses DeVoe's perspective to interweave disagreements over strategy, money, and leadership into the narrative. She explains why western women like DeVoe and Abigail Scott Duniway preferred the "still-hunt" strategy rather than an eastern-style political campaign (115). Yet Ross-Nazzal finds DeVoe's tactics flexible and adaptable enough to work briefly with Alice Paul. As a result of chronic financial troubles, DeVoe was paid for much of her suffrage work, which led her detractors "to question her morals and

commitment to suffrage" (7). Disagreements over tactics, leadership style, and money created the little-known but fascinating political power struggle between Emma DeVoe and May Arkwright Hutton over control of the Washington Equal Suffrage Association (125-30). That political struggle gives readers an insider's view of the diversity of opinion and activities on the state level.

This study provides more evidence of how little the National American Suffrage Association understood western conditions. After DeVoe led Washington suffragists to victory in 1910, she established the National Council of Women Voters as an independent organization of western states. Ross-Nazzari asserts that historians "have failed to understand just how important the council's leadership was to the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment" (7), and she concludes that "regionalism . . . played a role in the shaping of battle plans to win passage of a suffrage amendment" (140).

This skillfully crafted and clearly written biography successfully explores the woman suffrage movement through the life of Emma Smith DeVoe. From her days in Dakota Territory through her years of service on the Republican National Committee, DeVoe worked tirelessly to gain political rights for American women. Ross-Nazzari has done a fine job of recovering her voice and has given her an important place in the history of woman suffrage.